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TWO PLAYS BY TCHEKHOF

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TWO PLAYS

BY

TCHEKHOF

THE SEAGULL

THE CHERRY ORCHARD

TRANSLATED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES, BY

GEORGE CALDERON

NEW YORK
MITCHELL KENNERLEY
MDCCCCXII

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TCHEKHOF

I

APOLOGETIC

TCHEKHOF wrote five important plays—*Iványof, Uncle Ványa, The Seagull, The Three Sisters,* and *The Cherry Orchard.* The rest are one-act farces. I have chosen *The Seagull* and *The Cherry Orchard* for this volume as representing him at two extremes. *The Seagull* is easy, *entraînant,* not much unlike a Western play; *The Cherry Orchard* is difficult, *rébarbatif* and very Russian.

While our new Drama is still in its plastic age, still capable of new impressions (for in spite of many obstacles a new Drama seems to be growing obscurely up in England), it is good for all who cherish it, playwrights, critics, and spectators, to keep the best foreign models before their eyes.

It is of course to Life itself that playwrights, like all other artists, must go, both for their matter and for their form. But Life is a very complicated affair. To different nations, to different generations, to different individuals, different views of it seem important. We sit studying one aspect with all our might, till some day we discover that we have been neglecting a hundred others; and off we career to pitch our campstools under another tree, whereon learned arboriculturists then hasten to hang a neat label with its proper name, Romanticism, Realism, Post-Impressionism or the like. We peer and pry about, eager to know if anyone has found a new clue to the elusive secret. We do not want to pinch his particular recipe, but we do want to know all possible methods, to see the lie of the whole country, like carrier-pigeons that fly round in circles before they choose their own way.

With French and German one may do a great deal; there is Hervieu, Donnay, Capus, Maeterlinck, Hauptmann, Hofmannsthal, Schnitzler, and a few translated Norsemen and Hollanders, all men with different philosophies of Art and Life, good to be inquired into. But the contribution of the Russians, though less accessible, is not less important. Andréyef, Górky, Tchírikof, Blok, Yushkévitch, Tchekhof, have studied aspects to which it is right that we should make ourselves sensitive.

It is in fact my Preface, not my Translation, that calls for apology. For, on the face of it, it is the business of a work of art to explain its own intentions. Still, the perfect work of art requires the perfect spectator; and it is in order to help the reader to become one, that I offer him the fruit of my meditations on Tchekhof; I want to clear

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his eyes, to make his vision "normal," like the unassuming Irishman's. For we Britons, perhaps more than any other nation, come to the contemplation of exotic art with a certain want of ease, a certain doubt where to focus our attention, a bewilderment as to what is foreignness in the matter and what is originality in its presentation.

And I do not think the queer performance of *The Cherry Orchard* (in another version) given before the Stage Society,[1] will have done anything to dispel that bewilderment or forestalled me in elucidating the secrets of Tchekhof's genius.

II

THE CENTRIFUGAL METHOD

A competent professional critic would easily stick a label on Tchekhof and push him without more ado into his proper pigeonhole; but, as a fumbling amateur, I must ask for the reader's indulgence while I go the long way round, retail all the differentiæ which I see in him as systematically as I can, and leave it to some experter person to condense them afterwards into the appropriate but undiscoverable word.

The most general idea under which I can sum up the essential characteristics of his plays is this: That the interest of them is, so to speak, "centrifugal" instead of self-centred; that they seek, not so much to draw our minds inwards to the consideration of the events they represent, as to cast them outwards to the larger process of the world which those events illuminate; that the sentiments to be aroused by the doings and sufferings of the personages on his stage are not so much hope and fear for their individual fortunes as pity and amusement at the importance which they set on them, and consolation for their particular tragedies in the spectacle of the general comedy of Life in which they are all merged; that Tchekhof's dramatic philosophy resembles in fact that modern theory of Physics which, instead of seeking in Matter itself for the final explanation of its nature, regards its constituent atoms as so many gaps or spaces in the primary substance, and turns the imagination outwards to contemplation of the Ether of which they break the majestic continuity.

III

GROUP EMOTIONS

In real life there is nothing of which we are more urgently, though less expressly, conscious, than the presence of other life humming about us, than the fact that our experiences and our impulses are very

[1] May 28, 1911.

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little private to ourselves, almost always shared with a group of other people. The private life of feelings and opinions is lived far down beneath the surface, in the innermost recesses of the soul. The chief springs of human conduct are group emotions; and the groups with which we share those emotions vary in magnitude from a man and his companion to a nation, a continent, or a world.

For many reasons this truth, however well ascertained, has hardly found its way as yet on to the stage. Tchekhof is a pioneer.

He shows us his little group of personages (there are never many parts in his plays) all subjected to the same influence or generating the same impulse at the same time. In most plays the action is continuous; there are episodes, or byways, but all lead into the same main road. In Tchekhof's plays many things are said and done which have no bearing on the action, but are directed only to creating the atmosphere. The players have to show, by difference of tone and gesture, when they are speaking to the action, which concerns them as individuals, and when they are speaking to the atmosphere, which concerns them as members of a group. The spectators have to distinguish what is painted in low tones and what stands sharply out, in order to grasp the central design.

Sometimes the alternation of action-lines and atmosphere-lines is very rapid, as in *The Cherry Orchard*, in which the author has carried his method so far, that the surface seems as rough as that of a French "vibrationist" picture seen close at hand, but, when looked at aright, falls into a simple unity, and from that very roughness gets qualities of life and light not otherwise attainable.

In *The Seagull* action and atmosphere are broken into masses large enough to be easily distinguished. In the first two acts, for instance, the author shows, by material symbols, the general tranquillity from which the commotions of individual life emerge.

We are in a garden at night; before us, a mile away, lies the seagull-haunted lake, shining in the light of the moon; about us hangs the enchantment of rustic quietude; and in our midst, only half divined, a storm is gathering that ultimately shatters the poetry of two young lives. In the dim moonlight of this scene the personages lose their individuality; they become shadows against the landscape, drinking in its beauty together, or setting off its grandeur by the banality of their conversation. When this was performed at Glasgow[1] all the characters but Nina, Trigórin and Madame Arcádina were gathered in a leisurely semicircle up-stage, facing the lake, some standing, some lounging in garden chairs; from time to time one sauntered across or stretched his arms, or lighted a cigarette. There was an air of idly trickling colloquy among them, and when Shamráyef told how the famous Silva once took the low C in the opera-house at Moscow, his

[1] Where Mr Wareing, the manager, bravely allowed me to do the producing.

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discreet crescendo emerged only as a higher ripple of the unemphatic irony in the background.

In the second act, where a squall of nerves is brewing, the conversation and behaviour of the personages have nothing to do with the action of the piece, but are directed to convey the atmosphere of tedium and heat in which such squalls are possible. Here we had yawns and fannings and moppings of the brow. With the entrance of the boorish land agent the passive group-emotion becomes suddenly active. Everyone abandons his listless attitude, alert with the sense of impending perturbation. "There are no horses to be had." A gust of anger goes through all the company; each breaks out in turn, according to the difference of his interest and disposition.

IV

ENGLISH ACTING

The English method of acting is evidently ill-suited to Tchekhof's work. The "centrifugal" Drama requires above all things "centripetal" acting, acting designed to restore the unity of impression. The French and English pieces on which our players have been brought up are so toughly made, their interest converges so powerfully on a central theme, that, so far from troubling their heads with restoring the unity, they have always been able to indulge their natural propensity to make the parts they play "stand out," like the choir-boy whose voice "was heard above the rest."

In the general struggle for conspicuity a sportsmanlike code has been established to give everyone a fair chance. As each actor opens his mouth to speak, the rest fall petrified into an uncanny stillness, like the courtiers about the Sleeping Beauty, or those pathetic clusters that one sees about a golf-tee, while one of the players is flourishing at his ball in preparation for a blow. But it is the very opposite of this cataleptic method that is required for the acting of Tchekhof. His disjunctive manner is defeated of its purpose unless the whole company keep continuously alive; and each line is so unmistakably coloured with the character of its speaker that there is no need for the rest to hold their breath and "point" that we may know who utters it.

In *The Cherry Orchard*, as the action of the play turns about the sale of the estate, all the means that the stage-manager has at his command for the differentiation of emphasis—as position, movement, change of pace in the delivery of the speeches—should be used to

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mark the superior importance of whatever concerns that transaction. And above all, the principal parts should be given to players of such imposing personality as to outweigh the rest of the company and throw them, without effort, into the second place.

V

CONTRAST OF MOODS

It is an old trick of novelists and playwrights to make surrounding Nature adapt herself to the moods of their personages; to make the dismal things happen in dismal weather, and the cheerful things in sunshine. In real life people as often as not make love on a foggy November morning and break it off on a moonlight night in June. But the artificiality of the old method may be excused by the unity of effect which it produces in the mind of the spectator.

There is a far finer effect however in disharmony, in contrasting instead of attuning the personages and their environment.

In his "Letters on the French Stage," Heine retails an excellent scene from a comedy called *Mariez-vous donc!* where a man, driven by the extravagance of his faithless wife to fiddle for his bread in a low dancing-ken, relates his misfortunes to a friend, fiddling all the while, and breaking off now and again to skip out among the dancers with a "Chassez!" or "En avant deux!" The discord between his narrative and his occupation sets before us in a very poignant fashion the indifference of Life at large to the individual destiny.

Tchekhof has made a system of such contrasts; you find them in all his plays. One of the chief scenes in *The Cherry Orchard* recalls the episode described by Heine. In Act III. we see Madame Ránevsky waiting to learn the result of the auction. She sits in the midst, a tragic figure, bewailing the imminent destruction of the orchard that is haunted by so many memories of her childhood and her ancestry. But everyone about her is indifferent; they have got in a band of Jewish fiddlers; a medley of ignoble guests and intrusive underlings dances to its silly jigging, "a tedious latter-day dance, with no life, no grace, no vigour in it, not even any desire of the flesh; and they do not realise that the very ground on which they are dancing is passing away from under their feet." [1] And for a climax of grotesqueness the half-crazy German governess dresses herself in a marionette costume, check trousers and tall hat, and

[1] See Meyerhold's masterly analysis of the scene at p. 143 of the Sbornik "Teatr," issued by "Szipòvnik" in 1908.

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dances a *pas seul* somewhere in the background amid the applause of the company.

The last act of *The Seagull*, where they sit down to play loto ("a tedious game, but all right when you're used to it"; it takes the place of the dance music in *The Cherry Orchard*) while Sorin, fast hurrying to his grave, dozes in a corner, and Constantine, the deserted lover, wanders restless and melancholy about the house, is a whole symphony of contrasted moods.

VI

THE ILLUSION OF THE EGO

Subdued to the life about him, each pursues his own separate thoughts and lives his own solitary life. This individual disjunction is a sort of contrapuntal rejoinder to the group-scheme and leads to the most penetratingly ironical discords and solutions.

At the card-table Trigórin and the doctor talk quite independently of Constantine's fortunes as an author; Madame Arcádina chatters to unheeding ears about her triumph at Khárkof and the bouquets that the students gave her, while Masha, attending strictly to the business of the game, cuts across them all with her incisive crying of the loto-numbers.

So in Act II. when Madame Arcádina explains how she keeps so young, nobody cares; the dingy Masha laments her own decay, and the Doctor, rather bored, turns back to the novel he was reading them.

In Act I. Constantine is all eagerness when the Doctor praises his play and bids him persevere; but his attention wanders as soon as Dorn begins to explain why, and his next question is, "Excuse me, where is Nina?" to which Dorn replies by developing his critical theory, and Constantine loses his temper.

There is a fine instance of this sort of counterpoint in *Ivánof*. Kosýkh, a gambler, dashes into the house of his friends to borrow money, breaks up their conversation, buttonholes each in turn to recount the *débâcle* of a hand that looked like a grand slam:

KOSÝKH.—I had ace and queen of clubs and four others; ace, ten and a little one in spades . . .

LEBEDEF (*stopping his ears*).—Spare me, spare me, for the love of Christ!

KOSÝKH (*to Shabélsky*).—You see? Ace, queen and four other clubs; ace, ten and a little one in spades . . .

SHABÉLSKY (*pushing him away*).—Go away! I don't want to hear!

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KOSÝKH.—We had the most infernal luck; my ace of spades was ruffed first round . . .

SHABÉLSKY (*picking up a revolver*).—Go away, or I'll fire.

KOSÝKH (*with a gesture of despair*).—Good God! There's not a soul to talk to anywhere! One might as well be in Australia; no solidarity, no common interests; each lives his own life. . . . However, I must be off.

VII

TRAGEDY AND COMEDY

Life is never pure comedy or pure tragedy. Old age is always pathetic, and usually ridiculous. The Universe does not stand still in awe of our private successes or misfortunes.

Tchekhof had that fine comedic spirit which relishes the incongruity between the actual disorder of the world and the underlying order. Seeking as he did to throw our eyes outwards from the individual destiny, to discover its relation to surrounding Life, he habitually mingled tragedy (which is Life seen close at hand) with comedy (which is Life seen from a distance). His plays are tragedies with the texture of comedy.

Some of his characters he endows with his own insight. They see their misfortunes, without malice, from the remote comedic point of view. Old Sorin in *The Seagull*, who is carrying to his grave a keen regret for an unadventurous life, lived without passion, without intensity, without achievement, spends his time in laughing. He sees the fun of the solemn practical joke that Nature has played with him. Masha, who is hopelessly and painfully in love with Constantine Tréplef,[1] when she hears him playing a melancholy waltz to solace his passion for someone else, instead of underlining the pathos, pirouettes slowly to the music, humming, with outstretched arms, before she comments on the situation.

As he developed his method Tchekhof sought more and more after the particular quality of life to be derived from the admixture of comedy with pathos. In his last play, *The Cherry Orchard* (his last work indeed, produced only a month or two before his death), the admixture seems at first sight excessive. Some of his personages—Yásha, Dunyásha, Ephikhódof, perhaps Charlotte and Gáyef too—would not be out of place in a knockabout farce. Even the sage, Trophímof, is made shabby and ridiculous, and sent tumbling downstairs at a

[1] By what strange mistake that eminent Tchekhovian critic, the Russian Eichenwald, convinced himself that Masha was in love with Trigórin, I cannot imagine; but he is very circumstantial about it. See "Pokrovsky," pp. 856, 857.

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tragic moment. It is true that real life is just as unceremonious with philosophers; but for the moment one is shocked. Let it be noted however that these folk are not random laughing-stocks; they are all sub-varieties of the species "nedotëpa" or "job-lot," and are expressly designed to carry out the central motive of the play. And are they indeed more farcical than actual people? Perhaps the respectable uniformity that we attribute to our fellow-men is all a convention, an illusion; they are in reality misshapen, gnomish and grotesque; we need a magician to open our eyes that we may see them as they are. I remember having that feeling very strongly in the street, on coming away from an exhibition of Mr Max Beerbohm's caricatures.

But one should not begin with *The Cherry Orchard*. Art that is too near to Nature always seems strange and unnatural. One should approach gradually, by way of something more conventional, like *The Seagull*.

VIII

GOOD AND EVIL

Tchekhof's endeavour to establish the true relation of Man to the surrounding universe did not end in a system of artistic formulæ; it was not a mere literary artifice; it embraced a profound philosophy. He endeavoured to establish Man's relation to his environment because it is only by reference to his environment that Man's nature, his doings and his sufferings, can rightly be interpreted.

To sever the individual, to abstract him in thought and try to determine the forces that sway him without reference to the rest of humanity, is as if a philosopher living at the sea's edge, by a gully in the rocks, should watch the water rise and fall in his gully, should observe the fishes and floating weeds and bits of wreckage that pass through it, and endeavour to explain their appearance and disappearance without taking into account the wide sea beyond, with its ebb and flow and changing incidents. He would not be merely limited in the scope of his conclusions; he would be positively wrong. And so, since ever we began to think in Europe, we have been wrong about Man.

To skip and rest and come to morals, we have been wrong, most irreligiously wrong, about Good and Evil. Where suffering is due to human agency we have sought in the individual, not merely for those last movements which make the suffering actual, but for the very fount and origin of Evil itself. We have attributed it to human malevolence, to corrupt and wicked will. (For the Devil was always

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half a clown and wholly irresponsible; saving the perversity of individual men and women he could at any time have been shut altogether out from human life.)

But the Zeitgeist is slowly bringing a new doctrine to light in our generation—revealing it to divers at one time in different places—that Evil in the world does not arise from Evil in men, but is a constant element in life, flowing not *out of* men's souls, but *through* them; that if we examine the causes of suffering, say, in London or St Petersburg at any given moment, we shall find that almost all is caused without evil intention, that it is the result of conditions over which no single person has any control, or of individual action prompted by motives of quite average innocence; that there are in fact no villains, or if there are, the amount of unhappiness they cause is so small that it may be neglected in a general estimate.

The old doctrine, that the man who did the thing was in himself the cause of his doing it, served well enough as a doctrine of the criminal law, for the criminal law rests, like magic, not on a theory of causation, but on the desire to express an emotion. But something better is needed in the arts, for they go behind common life to search out the hidden sequences.

I am afraid that this new doctrine of irresponsibility looks rather like another of those paradoxes which the writers of this generation, as is well known, now that all the true things have been said so often, are driven to utter in order to get themselves any reputation of originality. It has an air of inconvenience about it. It will never have a chance outside literature. It can have no hope of recognition among those stout upholders of exploded superstitions, the leaders of the Social Revolution. For with the legend of the Criminal Poor the fable of the Wicked Rich must also go overboard; and without that particular myth in their shot-garlands, they might as well haul down the red flag and put into port again.

Those two great platforms, the tub and the stage, both offer the same temptation to those who discourse from them: to choose the short way, not the right way, of convincing their auditors. When you have only minutes or hours to expound what requires weeks or years, it is no use trying to get new or right ideas into people's heads; the only thing to do is to execute variations on the old wrong ones they have there already. And the doctrine that individual man is the source of evil is such a handy one for the theatre; villains afford such a convenient machinery for developing our old favourite dramatic action, the struggle of opposing wills. Our sympathies need to be enlisted on this side or on that in the contest, by the assurance that the one is right and the other wrong, or a play is likely to be as dull as a cock-fight or a boxing-match where nobody cares which of the combatants wins.

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Still, there is a growing disposition among the *sept cents honnêtes gens*, who are pregnant with the public opinion of the next generation, to demand the Truth at any price (after all, Mankind will always adjust itself to the Truth, if only the authorities will allow it); and this new dogma of irresponsibility is at last beginning to grope its way on to the boards. A certain semblance of it is to be found in Mr Galsworthy's plays; but only a semblance; for there is always a hobgoblin there, a phantom of Society, with an uncommon resemblance to the old bogle of the Wicked Rich, getting unmercifully thwacked in the background. Mr Galsworthy, with his benevolent air, is a great hater, essentially a thwacker. But Tchekhof was like Dostoyévsky; he hated nothing and no one. He would not have said, "Woe unto you!" even to the Pharisees, but would have written short stories to explain their attitude.

For him the channels of Evil are innocent and lovable. Trigórin, who desolates two happy young lives, wakens affection and compassion in the audience. Tchekhof made him the express image of himself, as who should say, "We are all capable of this." Trigórin seemed to himself to have recaptured the lost poetry of his youth; it was the instinct for beauty that set him on the adventure; it was by the irony of Life, not by the badness of his will, that his desire for a beautiful thing destroyed it. He was a simple-minded man with no vanities and no ambitions, with shy, kindly manners, a man who took a harmless delight, like Tchekhof himself, in sitting by a pond and fishing for chub with a worm and a float. Everybody liked him.

It is all very perverse, but it is the perversity of real life.

IX

VILLAINS AND HEROES

Having no villains, it goes without saying that Tchekhof has no heroes. His drama is not a drama of conflicting wills. He does not invite you to stake your sympathies on this side or on that. All his characters are ranged together against the common enemy, Life, whether they are drawn up in two battalions or in one.

It is idle therefore to discuss where the author's sympathies lie in *The Cherry Orchard*, whether with Lopákhin or with Madame Ránevsky and her brother Gáyef. And yet, thanks to the tradition of the theatre, such a discussion is sure to arise every time that *The Cherry Orchard* is seen on the stage. And the players will already have prejudged it by the reading they have taken of their parts.

On the whole, after the Stage Society performance, the general

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opinion was that the owners of the Cherry Orchard were meant to be delightful people and Lopákhin a brute. And well-informed Russians over here who had seen the piece in Moscow said that this opinion was undoubtedly right, and that was the way it was played at the Artistic Theatre, to the author's own satisfaction.

Nevertheless, for a hundred reasons, of which I will give only two or three, this opinion is undoubtedly wrong. In the conflict of classes, of traditions and ideals that shook his time, Tchekhof took no part. "I am neither a liberal, nor a conservative, nor a moderate, nor a monk, nor an indifferentist," he wrote to Pleshtchéyef.[1] "I want to be a free artist and nothing more." (What we call the "fine" arts are more finely called the "free" arts in Russia.) "You ought to describe everyday love and family life without villains or angels," he wrote to Leikin.[2] "Be objective," he wrote to Shtcheglóf[3]; "look at everything with your customary kind eyes; sit down and write us a story or play of Russian life, not a criticism of Russian life, but the joyful song of a goldfinch (*shtcheglá*) about Russian life and human life in general, life which is given us but once and which it is foolish to waste on exposing the wickedness of" so and so.

To me he seems to have been most scrupulously fair in sharing out the virtues and vices evenly to all his characters alike. Gáyef and his sister are warm-hearted, generous and picturesque, but then how frivolous, how unpractical, how impossible! They are still the noblesse, but all the faculties of the noblesse for cleaving to their property have evaporated out of them. I think he must have chosen the name Gáyef for the faint flavour that it has of *gáyer*, a mountebank. Lopákhin is illiterate and material; his name suggests shovels and gobbling (*lopáty* and *lópat*); but then how efficient he is, how useful to his generation! He is like St Nicholas, the ploughman-hero in the old ballad, whistling gaily to his team as he drives a furrow from the Dnieper to the Ural. He is tender-hearted and generous; he is an idealist, an artist in his way; he has "thin delicate artist-fingers," he has a "delicate artist-soul." A great part of him indeed is Tchekhof himself. Tchekhof's grandfather was a serf and his father kept a grocer's shop in Taganrog. "Peasant blood flows in my veins," he writes to Suvórin: "and you cannot astonish me with the virtues of the peasantry. I have always believed in Progress from my childhood up, and could not help believing in it, for the difference between the time when I used to get thrashed and the time when I stopped getting thrashed was something tremendous." It might be Lopákhin speaking.

[1] "Letters," i. 159. (For a full description of the books referred to in these notes see the Bibliography at the end of the volume.)
[2] "Leikin," p. 375.
[3] "Letters," i. 230.

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No; Lopákhin is neither the villain nor the hero of *The Cherry Orchard*. There is no villain and no hero. Tchekhof is merely singing a song of Russian life and human life in general; not indeed the "joyful song of a goldfinch," but rather the plaintive elegy of a ringdove, contemplating our troubled world, a "free artist," from the solitude of the woods.[1]

X

REALISM

Mr Maurice Baring, our principal expounder of modern Russian literature, says the great thing about it is that it represents ordinary life; he says that the Russian goes to the theatre to see what he sees every day outside the theatre; that Tchekhof chooses for the action of his plays "moments which appear at first sight to be trivial."[2]

What a tedious and unnecessary literature it would be if that were true! What, however, are Tolstoy's themes? Seduction and adultery, battle, murder and sudden death. Dostoyévsky's? An innocent gentleman in a felon's prison, a student assassin hunted by the police, a girl who sold her virtue to feed her family. Tchekhof's? There is only one of his plays that does not end with a pistol-shot; they contain two suicides, a duel and an attempted murder. Surely Mr Baring must have been very unfortunate if he thinks that this is everyday Russian life!

Is it not plain that, Russians and English, we all go to the theatre to see what we do *not* see in everyday life? For in everyday life we see, with undiscerning eyes, only the little corner penetrated by our own routine. Playwrights show us men and women in extraordinary circumstances; for it is only extraordinary circumstances that reveal the secrets of their nature and illuminate the whole path of their existence.

The differentia of Tchekhof is that the extraordinary moments which explode in pistol-shots are never the result of sudden causes, but are brought about by the cumulative tragedy of daily life; not ordinary daily life, in the sense of everyone's daily life, but the life of men tragically situated, like Tréplef, or Ivánof, or Uncle Ványa.

[1] By no means all well-informed Russians maintain that Lopákhin is the villain of the piece. Górky, Kárpof and G. Petróff (see a deeply-felt article by him "In Defence of Lopákhin" in "The Tchekhof Jubilee Sbornik") look on him as the hero; indeed, Merezhkóvsky says, "*All the Russian Intelligenz* applauded this triumph of the new life."

[2] "Landmarks in Russian Literature," p. 21.

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If the Russians are realists, it is not because they go to real life for their matter. Every artist goes to real life for his matter, and from its chaos brings us an idea. Even the least realistic artists are concerned with life to that extent; and the tragedies of Corneille and Racine are just as much extracts of life as the comedies of Ibsen or Mr Granville Barker.

The specific difference of the realist is that, having extracted his idea, instead of further distilling the extract (as the Classicist does) or disguising it with mysterious essences (as the Romantic does), he endeavours to restore to it the flavour of reality. He endeavours to manifest the very texture and illusion of Life itself. Having unravelled a thread, he shows it us with a new artful tangle of his own, cheating us by its resemblance to the tangle of the skein from which he drew it.[1]

The Realist does not copy Life (the result would be meaningless); he explains it (that is the business of Art) and gives his explanation the air of a copy. His intention is to take in simple-minded people. What a triumph to have taken in Mr Baring!

XI

SOLILOQUIES

There is one commandment in the decalogue of Realism that Tchekhof habitually breaks, and that is the commandment forbidding soliloquies. This is a law which no playwright must disregard if he would pass for modern. Indeed, one is often puzzled and embarrassed by the sudden silence which descends on a talkative stage-personage, when, by the exit of the others, he happens to be left by himself for a moment on the scene. If he says "Pshaw," or sighs, or clears his throat, it is the most you can expect of him. Usually he lights a cigarette.

But Tchekhof's plays are full of soliloquies; and I venture to protest that Tchekhof is right and the rest are wrong. Certainly the old-fashioned "aside," by which the comedian treated his audience as a confidential friend, winked and grinned, poked it, as it were, in the ribs and invited it to laugh with him at the rest of the company—

[1] It is, in the same way, by their method, not by their subject-matter, that Classicism and Romanticism are to be distinguished. "The expressions Classical and Romantic refer only to the spirit of the treatment. The treatment is classical when the form of the representation is identical with the idea represented; the treatment is romantic when the form does not reveal the idea through identity, but lets us divine it by an allegory" (Heine, "Deutschland," Book I.).

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that was a stupid thing, a mere trick, like cheeking the bandmaster in a pantomime. But to banish that other kind of solitary speaking, by which a man conveys to the audience what is passing in his mind when they could have no other means of learning it, is altogether a mistake. For what, after all, is the subject-matter of a play? It is not mere outward action; it is also thought and will culminating in action, and this latter element is, to the judicious spectator, "much the noblest" part of Drama, and indeed, with Tchekhof, the greater part; for his plays, rightly understood, are more than half soliloquy; the characters seem to converse, but in reality sit side by side and think aloud.[1]

"Our inner life moves in monologues from morning to night, and even our dreams are still monologues of the soul. They are not spoken aloud, that is all; that is the outward difference over which our petty little modern code of æsthetics makes so much ado," says an excellent critic of latter-day drama.[2]

It is true that a man does not talk aloud when he is left alone in a room; but then, to be consistent, we should also drop the curtain, for when a man is alone no one sees him.

XII

SYMBOLISM

Tchekhof did not often use symbols in the old-fashioned sense, material objects adumbrating immaterial meanings, designed to catch attention by their superficial irrelevance, like the lambs and lilies of pictured saints. Certainly the eponymous seagull that flew about the lake, and then was shot and stuffed and fixed on a wooden stand, is a symbol of that kind, in itself neither better nor worse than the sort of symbols that Ibsen was fond of using; only Tchekhof used his symbol beautifully and pathetically, while in Ibsen's use of symbols, such as that tower from which the Master-builder fell, while his sweetheart hopped about and waved a flag like a suffragette, or that wild duck which the old gentleman kept in the attic, there is always a touch of ugliness and insanity.

Except the seagull I can recall no other example in Tchekhof's plays of a symbol of the artless kind that can be stored in the property-room. But there is a more beautiful and recondite Symbolism, one that harmonises better with the realistic method, and that is the Symbolism by which the events of the Drama are not merely represented for their own sake but stand also as emblems and generalisa-

[1] See Eichenwald in "Pokrovsky," p. 891.

[2] R. von Gottschall, "Zur Kritik des modernen Dramas," 1900, p. 117.

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tions about life at large. The relation of the characters to each other in *The Seagull*, for instance, evidently symbolises the universal frustration of desire (and how intensely the author carries this idea through all the play!): Medvédenko is in love with Masha, Masha is in love with Constantine, Constantine is in love with Nina, Nina is in love with Trigórin, Pauline is in love with Dorn, and Dorn is in love with himself. Each yearns to change his lot, to go back or to go forward. Trigórin wants youth, Nina and Tréplef want glory; Trigórin has it but has never noticed it; he can only suppose that it "produces no sensation."

Perhaps at bottom all plays are symbolical. Perhaps Life itself is symbolical, and the pursuit of women's love is, as Maupassant divined, only an allegory and image of the pursuit of that "beauté mystique, entrevue et insaisissable" towards which some Protean instinct of our nature urges us.

. . . . . .

The Russian critics are sure that there is a message of substantial hope in Tchekhof's plays, just as the shepherds in Tchekhof's story, "Happiness," are sure that there is gold hidden in the old Tartar barrows on the steppe. Again and again his characters aver that this age of folly and wrong is drawing to an end, that in two or three hundred years (the date is always given) we may confidently look for the Millennium. And this, they say, is not dramatic and irresponsible; it represents his own view. In private life he more than once declared his faith in Progress. "How beautiful life will be in another three hundred years!" "Once upon a time this place was a wilderness covered with stones and thistles," he said to Kúprin in the garden of his Yalta villa;[1] "but I came and cultivated it and made it beautiful"; then, with an earnest face and in tones of the deepest conviction, "In two or three hundred years all the earth will become a garden full of flowers." Almost the very words used by Trophímof and repeated by the trustful Ánya in *The Cherry Orchard*.[2]

Well, if anyone finds comfort in believing that Tchekhof's plays support this doctrine of shallow optimism, let him believe it! To me it seems the dolefullest renunciation of all hope. If Tchekhof, who saw so clearly that in real life all tales end badly, had to console himself by supposing that some day they would all begin to end well, it is enough to strike panic into one. Is Life then really so bad that strong earnest men must needs become timid and frivolous rather than face the conclusions to which reason leads them?

[1] See "Pámyati Tchékhova," 1906, p. 104.

[2] In a letter which he wrote in 1902 to Dyagilëf, Tchekhof changed the date to "tens of thousands of years" ahead ("Letters," p. 262). De Vogüé, in a refreshing article, full of cold water, describes his attitude as "un découragement absolu quant au présent, corrigé par un vague millénarisme, par une foi tremblotante au progrès indéfini" (*Revue des Deux Mondes*, January 1902).

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I fancy the Russian critics are mistaken. Tchekhof probably said many foolish things in private life, as other great men have done; but I doubt if he repeated them in the same good faith when the wisdom of the artist descended on him. The satirist, like every other writer, goes to himself for much of his material; pen in hand he sees his own foibles with the sobriety of inspiration. Do not believe that Tchekhof the dramatist was gulled by the enthusiasms of that Tchekhof who walked in the garden at Yalta! It is all his sad fun. Into whose mouth does he put the hopefullest sentiments in *The Cherry Orchard*? Into the mouth of Trophímof, the "mouldy gentleman," "Pierre the Ploughman"; a fine guarantor for the Millennium! Is not the whole play strown with the shattered illusions of the Trophímofs of the generation before, the men who thought that in Emancipation and Education they had found the talisman? And that constant reference to the date of its advent, the precision of the "two or three hundred years," did Tchekhof not relish the irony of that?

Surely it is another piece of Symbolism. Each generation believes that it stands on the boundary line between an old bad epoch and a good new one. And still the world grows no better; rather worse; hungrier, less various, less beautiful. That is true; but there is consolation in the assurance that whatever becomes of this husk of a planet, the inner meaning of it, hope itself, God, man's ideal, continually progresses and develops. If that is not what Tchekhof meant, it seems at anyrate the best interpretation of what he wrote.

G. CALDERON.

HAMPSTEAD, 1911.

P.S.—I ought to have mentioned that Tchekhof was born in 1860, studied medicine at Moscow, and died in 1904.

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THE SEAGULL

The Seagull *was first produced in* 1896 *at the Alexandrýnsky Theatre, one of the State theatres in St Petersburg. It was a failure; it was hissed. "Everybody assured me that the characters were all lunatics," Tchekhof wrote to a friend ("Letters," p.* 224): *"that my play was clumsy in technique, that it was stupid, obscure, idiotic even. . . ." He fled to the country and swore that he would write no more for the stage.*

The next year Stanislavsky put it on at the Artistic Theatre in Moscow, and it was a brilliant success. Since then Tchekhof's plays and Stanislavsky's playhouse have made each other famous.

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THE SEAGULL

Played at the Glasgow Repertory Theatre in November 1909.

	Glasgow, 1909
MADAME ARCÁDINA, *an actress*	Miss MARY JERROLD
CONSTANTINE TRÉPLEF, *her son*	Mr MILTON ROSMER
SÓRIN, *her brother*	Mr LAURENCE HANRAY
NINA, *daughter of a rich landowner*	Miss IRENE CLARKE
SHAMRÁYEF, *retired lieutenant, Manager of Sorin's estate*	Mr HUBERT HARBEN
PAULINE, *his wife*	Miss MARIE HUDSPETH
MASHA, *their daughter*	Miss LOLA DUNCAN
TRIGÓRIN, *a writer*	Mr CAMPBELL GULLAN
DORN, *a doctor*	Mr M. R. MORAND
MEDVÉDENKO, *a schoolmaster*	Mr PERCEVAL CLARK
YÁKOF	Mr GRIFFITHS
COOK	Mr GEORGE WYLEY
HOUSEMAID	Miss EVA CHAPLIN

THE ACTION[1] TAKES PLACE ON SORIN'S ESTATE.
TWO YEARS ELAPSE BETWEEN ACTS III. AND IV.

[1] Or "inaction," as Count de Vogüé prefers to call it.

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ACT I

In the park of SORIN'S *estate. A broad avenue runs away from the spectators into the depths of the park towards a lake; the avenue is blocked by a rough stage knocked together for amateur theatricals, concealing the lake. Bushes to right and left. A table and chairs.*

The sun has just set. On the stage, behind the curtain, which is down, are YAKOF *and other workmen; coughing and hammering.*

Enter MASHA *and* MEDVEDENKO, *returning from a walk*

MEDVEDENKO.—Why do you always wear black?

MASHA.—I'm in mourning for my life. I am unhappy.

MEDVEDENKO.—Why? (*Reflectively*) I don't understand.... You're healthy, and though your father is not rich he is quite well off. My life is far heavier to bear than yours. I'm paid only forty-eight shillings a month, minus a deduction for the pension fund; but for all that I don't wear mourning. (*They sit.*)

MASHA.—It isn't a question of money. Even a pauper may be happy.

MEDVEDENKO.—In theory, yes; but in point of practice, there's me and my mother, two sisters and my brother, and my salary's only forty-eight shillings a month. One must eat and drink, eh? One must have tea and sugar; one must have tobacco. There's no getting round that.

MASHA (*looking round at the stage*).—The play begins very soon.

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MEDVEDENKO.—Yes. Nina Zarétchnaya is to act, and the play is by Constantine Tréplef. They are in love with each other and to-day their spirits will unite in the effort to produce a common artistic image. But my spirit and yours have no common points of contact. I love you; I cannot sit at home for longing for you; every day I come four miles on foot and four miles back again and meet only with a *non possumus* [1] on your part. Naturally. I have no means; we're a big family. Why should anyone want to marry a man who cannot even feed himself?

MASHA.—Fiddlesticks. (*Taking snuff.*) I am touched by your affection, but I cannot return it; that's all. (*Offering him the snuff box.*) Help yourself.

MEDVEDENKO.—Not for me. (*A pause.*)

MASHA.—It's very close; we shall probably have a storm to-night. You are always either philosophising or talking about money. You think there is no greater misfortune than poverty; but I think it is a thousand times easier to wear rags and beg for bread than . . . However, you wouldn't understand.

Enter SORIN *and* TREPLEF, R.

SORIN (*leaning on a stick*).—My dear boy, I never *do* feel at home in the country. And naturally, I'm too old to get used to it now. I went to bed at ten last night and woke this morning at nine, feeling as if my brain were sticking to my skull from too much sleep and all the rest of it. (*Laughing.*) After dinner I fell asleep again without intending it, and now I'm all to pieces, still suffering from nightmare, confound it all. . . .

TREPLEF.—Yes, you ought to live in town. (*Seeing* MASHA *and* MEDVEDENKO.) Hullo! You'll be called when the play begins; but you mustn't sit here now. I must ask you to go away, please.

[1] *Non possumus.* The village pedant emerges. In the Russian, Medvédenko says "*indifferentism*" instead of "*ravnodúshie,*" indifference. The words are so much alike in English that a literal rendering would spoil the point.

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SORIN (*to* MASHA).—Márya Ilyínitchna, would you kindly ask your father to have that dog unchained, to keep it from howling? My sister had another sleepless night.

MASHA.—You must speak to my father yourself. I'm not going to. So please don't ask me. (*To* MEDVEDENKO.) Come on.

MEDVEDENKO (*to* TREPLEF).—Let us know before the play begins, then.

[*Exeunt* MEDVEDENKO *and* MASHA

SORIN.—That means that the dog will howl all night again. There you are! I've never had my own way in the country. In the old days, whenever I took a month's holiday and came here to recoup and all the rest of it, I was always worried so with every sort of nonsense, that before the first day was out I was wishing myself back again. (*Laughing.*) I always enjoyed the going away most. . . . And now I've retired, I've nowhere to go to, confound it all. Whether one likes it or not one's got to lump it. . . .

YAKOF (*from the stage, to* TREPLEF).—We're going to have a bathe, Constantine Gavrílitch.

TREPLEF.—All right. But you must be back at your places in ten minutes. (*Looking at his watch.*) It begins very soon.

YAKOF.—Very good, sir. (*Exit.*)

TREPLEF (*glancing at the stage*).—What do you think of that for a theatre? Curtain, first wing, second wing, and then empty space. No scenery. You look straight on to the lake and the horizon. The curtain goes up at exactly half-past eight, when the moon rises.

SORIN.—Magnificent!

TREPLEF.—If Nina is late, of course the whole effect will be spoilt. It's time she arrived. Her father and stepmother are always watching her, and it's as hard for her to escape from the house as it is for a prisoner to escape from jail. (*Puts his uncle's tie straight.*) Your hair and beard are all rumpled. You ought to have them cut, don't you think?

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SORIN (*smoothing out his beard*).—It's the tragedy of my life. Even when I was young I always looked as if I had taken to drink and all the rest of it. Women never loved me. (*Sitting.*) Why is your mother in such low spirits ?

TREPLEF.—Oh, she's bored. (*Sitting by him.*) She's jealous. She's already hostile to me and to the whole performance, because it's Nina Zarétchnaya acting and not she. She hates my play, even before she's seen it.

SORIN (*laughing*).—Well I never ! Well I never !

TREPLEF.—She is vexed at the idea of Nina Zarétchnaya and not herself having a success even in this poor little theatre. (*Looking at his watch.*) She is a psychological curiosity, is my mother. A clever and gifted woman, who can cry over a novel, will reel you off all Nekrásof's poems[1] by heart, and is the perfection of a sick nurse ; but venture to praise Eleonora Duse before her ! Oho ! ho ! You must praise nobody but her, write about her, shout about her, and go into ecstasies over her wonderful performance in *La Dame aux Camélias*, or *The Fumes of Life*[2] ; but as she cannot have these intoxicating pleasures down here in the country, she's bored and gets spiteful ; we are her enemies, she thinks ; it's all our fault. Then, she's superstitious, is afraid of the number thirteen, or three candles on a table.[3] She's a miser, too. She has seven thousand pounds in the bank at Odessa ; I know it for certain. But ask her to lend you anything and she'll cry.

SORIN.—You have got it into your head that she doesn't

[1] *Nekrásof's poems.* This shows her tender heart. Nekrásof is one of the *apôtres de la pitié sociale.*

[2] *Fumes of Life.* A play by B. Markévitch, produced under the title *Ólga Rántseva* at the Alexandrynsky Theatre, St Petersburg, in 1888. Madame Arcádina evidently starred the provinces in the principal rôles of the famous Sávina. We may imagine her also as Magda and the Second Mrs Tanqueray. Sávina, by the by, played Arcádina in *The Seagull* ; Arcádina would have insisted on playing Nina.

[3] *Three candles on a table.* A presage of death ; for in Russia three candles are put by a dead body, two at the head and one at the feet. The same superstition holds in Ireland.

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like your play, and you are nervous and all the rest of it. Set your mind at rest, your mother worships you.

TREPLEF (*pulling the petals from a flower*).—She loves me, she loves me not, she loves me, she loves me not, she loves me, she loves me not. (*Laughs.*) You see, my mother doesn't love me. Why should she? She wants to live, to love, to wear pretty frocks; and I, I am twenty-five years old, and a perpetual reminder that she is no longer young. When I'm not there, she is only thirty-two; when I am, she's forty-three, and she hates me for that. She also knows that I don't believe in the stage. She loves the stage; she thinks that she is advancing the cause of humanity and her sacred art; but I regard the stage of to-day as mere routine and prejudice. When the curtain goes up and the gifted beings, the high priests of the sacred art, appear by electric light, in a room with three sides to it, representing how people eat, drink, love, walk and wear their jackets; when they strive to squeeze out a moral from the flat, vulgar pictures and the flat, vulgar phrases, a little tiny moral, easy to comprehend and handy for home consumption, when in a thousand variations they offer me always the same thing over and over and over again—then I take to my heels and run, as Maupassant ran from the Eiffel Tower, which crushed his brain by its overwhelming vulgarity.

SORIN.—We can't get along without the stage.

TREPLEF.—We must have new formulæ. That's what we want. And if there *are* none, then it's better to have nothing at all. (*Looks at his watch.*) I love my mother, I love her dearly; but it's a tomfool life that she leads with this novelist always at her elbow, and her name for ever in the papers—it disgusts me! Sometimes it is just the egotism of the ordinary man that speaks in me; I am sorry that I have a famous actress for my mother, and I feel that if she had been an ordinary woman I should have been happier. Uncle Peter, what position could be more hopeless and absurd than mine was at home with her? Her drawing-room filled with nothing but celebrities, actors and writers, and among them all the only

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nobody, myself, tolerated only because I was her son. Who am I? What am I? Sent down from the University without a degree through circumstances for which the editor cannot hold himself responsible, as they say; with no talents, without a farthing, and according to my passport a Kief artisan; for my father was officially reckoned a Kief artisan, although he was a famous actor. So that when these actors and writers in her drawing-room graciously bestowed their attention on me, it seemed to me that they were merely taking the measure of my insignificance; I guessed their thoughts and felt the humiliation.

SORIN.—What sort of man is this novelist, by the by? I can't make him out. He never talks.

TREPLEF.—Intelligent, simple, inclined to melancholy. Quite a good chap. Famous already before he's forty, and sated with everything. . . . As for his writings . . . what shall I say? Charming, talented . . . but . . . you wouldn't want to read Trigórin after Tolstoy or Zola.

SORIN.—I love literary people, my boy. There was a time when I passionately desired two things; I wanted to be married, and I wanted to be a literary man, but neither of them came my way. Ah! how pleasant to be even an unknown writer, confound it all.

TREPLEF (*listening*).—I hear someone coming. (*Embracing* SORIN.) I cannot live without her. . . . Even the sound of her footsteps is charming. . . . I am insanely happy.

Enter NINA. TREPLEF *goes quickly to meet her.*

TREPLEF.—My lovely one, my dream. . . .

NINA (*agitated*).—I'm not late . . . I'm sure I'm not late. . . .

TREPLEF (*kissing her hands*).—No, no, no. . . .

NINA.—I've been so anxious all day; I was so frightened. I was afraid father would not let me come. . . . But at last he's gone out, just now, with my stepmother. There's a red glow in the sky, the moon is beginning to rise, and I whipped up the horses as fast as I could. (*Laughing.*) But I am happy now. (*Squeezing* SORIN'S *hand heartily.*)

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SORIN (*laughing*).—You've been crying, I can see. . . . Hey, hey! You naughty girl!

NINA.—It's quite true. You see how out of breath I am. I've got to go in half-an-hour; we must hurry. I must, I must; don't detain me for heaven's sake. Father doesn't know I'm here.

TREPLEF.—It's quite true, it's time to begin. I must go and call the others.

SORIN.—I'll go, I'll go, confound it all. I won't be a minute. (*Goes* R., *singing.*) "To France were returning two Grenadiers!" (*Looks round.*) I remember I started singing like that one day, and an Assistant Procureur [1] who was standing by said: "Your Excellency, you have a very strong voice." Then he pondered, and added: "Strong, but ugly!"

[*Exit, laughing*

NINA.—My father and his wife won't let me come here. They say that you are all Bohemians. . . . They are afraid of my becoming an actress. But I am drawn towards the lake like a seagull. My heart is full of you. (*Looks round.*)

TREPLEF.—We are alone.

NINA.—Isn't there someone over there?

TREPLEF.—No, there's no one. (*Kissing her.*)

NINA.—What sort of tree is that?

TREPLEF.—It's an elm.

NINA.—Why is it so dark?

TREPLEF.—It's evening already; everything looks darker. Don't go away early, I entreat you.

NINA.—I must.

TREPLEF.—Shall I drive over to-night, Nina? I will stand all night in the garden and look up at your window.

[1] *Assistant Procureur.* Some cheeky junior of forty. Sorin's career has been passed among Procureurs and Assistant Procureurs, a special breed of prosecuting counsel attached to the Ministry of Justice. He has worked his way up to the dignity of Over-Procureur, with the title of Actual State Councillor, on a level with Major-Generals and Rear-Admirals according to Peter the Great's Table of Comparative Precedence.

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NINA.—You mustn't. The watchman will see you. Trésor is not used to you yet; he'll bark.

TREPLEF.—I love you.

NINA.—'Sh!

TREPLEF (*hearing footsteps*).—Who's there? Is that you, Yákof?

YAKOF (*on the stage*).—Yes, sir.

TREPLEF.—Get to your places. It's time to begin. Is the moon up?

YAKOF.—Yes, sir.

TREPLEF.—Have you the methylated spirits? And the sulphur? (*To* NINA.) When the red eyes appear, there has to be a smell of sulphur. You'd better go, you'll find everything there. Are you nervous?

NINA.—Yes, very. I don't mind your mother; I'm not afraid of her; but Trigórin will be here. I am frightened at acting before him. Such a famous writer! Is he young?

TREPLEF.—Yes.

NINA.—What wonderful stories he writes!

TREPLEF (*coldly*).—Does he? I don't read them.

NINA.—Your play is very hard to act. There are no live people in it.

TREPLEF.—Live people! why should there be? A writer's business is not to represent life as it is; nor as he thinks it ought to be, but as it appears in reveries.

NINA.—There's very little action in your piece; it is all lines.[1] And I think a play ought always to have a love interest in it. . . .

[*Exeunt behind the stage*

Enter PAULINE *and* DORN

PAULINE.—It is getting damp. Go back and put on your goloshes.

DORN.—I'm too hot.

PAULINE.—You take no care of yourself. It's all obstinacy.

[1] *Lines.* Russian, *czitka*, a piece of theatrical slang that Nina is no doubt pleased at knowing.

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You're a doctor, and you know perfectly well that the damp air is bad for you; but you like to give me pain; you sat on the verandah the whole of yesterday evening on purpose.

DORN (*singing*).—"Say not that I have spoilt thy youth."

PAULINE.—You were so taken up talking to Madame Arcádina, you did not notice the cold. Confess, that you admire her.

DORN.—I am fifty-five.

PAULINE.—Nonsense, that's not old for a man. You are well preserved and women still admire you.

DORN.—Then what do you want of me?

PAULINE.—You men are always ready to fall down and grovel before an actress. Always!

DORN (*singing*).—"Once more, once more before thee, love." If society is fond of actors and actresses and treats them differently, for instance, from shopkeepers, that is very natural. That is idealism.

PAULINE.—Women have always fallen in love with you, and thrown themselves at your head. Is that idealism too?

DORN (*shrugs his shoulders*).—Why, there has always been something charming in the relation of women to me. What they principally liked in me was the skilful doctor. Ten or fifteen years ago, you remember, I was the only decent *accoucheur* in the whole province. Besides, I was always an honest man.

PAULINE (*taking his hand*).—My beloved!

DORN.—Hush! There's somebody coming.

Enter ARCADINA, *arm-in-arm with* SORIN, TRIGORIN, SHAMRAYEF, MEDVEDENKO, MASHA

SHAMRAYEF.—In 1873 at the Fair at Poltava she acted superbly! A wonderful piece of acting! Do you happen to know too what's become of Chadin, Paul Chadin, the comedian? As Raspluyef he was simply A1; better than Sadovsky,[1] I assure you. What's become of *him*?

[1] *Better than Sadovsky.* This is like saying: He was simply splendid in *Ici on parle français*; much funnier than Toole, I can assure you. Sadovsky was a Moscow star who died in 1872; Raspluyef is a low-comedy character in Sukhovo-Kobylin's play, *Kretchinsky's Wedding.*

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ARCADINA.—You are always wanting to know about somebody before the flood. How should I know? (*Sits.*)

SHAMRAYEF (*sighing*).—Good old Paul Chadin! We have no one like that now. The stage has gone to the dogs, Irina Nikolayevna. There were mighty oaks in the old days, but now we see nothing but stumps.

DORN.—There are not many really brilliant people on the stage now, that is true; but the average actor is far better.

SHAMRAYEF.—I can't agree with you. However, it's a matter of taste. De gustibus aut bene, aut nihil.

TREPLEF *comes out from behind the stage.*

ARCADINA.—My dear child, when does the thing begin?

TREPLEF.—In a minute. Please be patient.

ARCADINA: "My son,
Thou turnst mine eyes into my very soul,
And there I see such blank and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct."

TREPLEF.—"Leave wringing of your hands. Peace, sit you down,
And let me wring your heart."[1] (*A horn is blown from the stage.*) Now then, the play begins. Attention, please! (*A pause.*) I speak first. (*He thumps with a stick; raising his voice.*) Hearken, ye venerable ancient shades, that hover in the night-time over this lake; send sleep upon us and let us dream of what will be in 200,000 years.

SORIN.—In 200,000 years there will be nothing at all.

TREPLEF.—Then let them represent that nothing to us.

ARCADINA.—Come on! We sleep.

The curtain rises; the view opens on the lake; the moon is above the horizon, reflected in the water; NINA *discovered sitting on a rock, dressed in white.*

NINA.—Men and lions, eagles and partridges, antlered deer,

[1] In the Russian Tréplef answers with a garbled version of Shakespeare's "nasty sty" lines. If we quoted them, we should have to be inconveniently exact. For this excellent substitute the translator is indebted to the ingenuity of Mr Hanray, who played Sorin in Glasgow.

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geese, spiders, the silent fishes dwelling in the water, star-fish and tiny creatures invisible to the eye—these and every form of life, ay, every form of life, have ended their melancholy round and become extinct. . . . Thousands of centuries have passed since this earth bore any living being on its bosom. All in vain does yon pale moon light her lamp. No longer do the cranes wake and cry in the meadows; the hum of the cockchafers is silent in the linden groves. All is cold, cold, cold. Empty, empty, empty. Terrible, terrible, terrible. (*A pause.*) The bodies of living beings have vanished into dust; the Eternal Matter has converted them into stones, into water, into clouds; and all their spirits are merged in one. I am that spirit, the universal spirit of the world. In me is the spirit of Alexander the Great, of Cæsar, of Shakespeare, of Napoleon, and of the meanest of leeches. In me the consciousness of men is merged with the instinct of animals; I remember everything, everything, everything, and in myself relive each individual life.[1]

Marsh fires appear.

ARCADINA (*in a low voice*).—This is going to be something decadent.

TREPLEF (*with reproachful entreaty*).—Mother!

NINA.—I am alone. Once in a hundred years I open my lips to speak, and my voice echoes sadly in this emptiness and no one hears. . . . You too, pale fires, you hear me not. . . . The corruption of the marsh engenders you towards morning, and you wander till the dawn, but without thought, without will, without throb of life. Fearing lest life should arise in

[1] The play attributed to Constantine is of course a kindly skit on the Decadents. But the philosophy at the bottom of it is a distorted image of the Pantheistic creed which Tchekhof really held. According to Merezhkovsky (p. 54) Deism (and this includes Christianity) is extinct among thinking Russians; they are all Pantheists (not Atheists, as Mr Maurice Baring tendentiously alleges); God for them is neither more nor less than the sum total of all mundane spirits. For Tchekhof, even to pick flowers was a kind of sacrilege ("Na Pamyat," p. 12).

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you, the father of Eternal Matter, the Devil, effects in you, as in stones and water, a perpetual mutation of atoms; you change unceasingly. In all the universe spirit alone remains constant and unchanging. (*A pause.*) Like a captive flung into a deep empty well, I know not where I am nor what awaits me. One thing only is revealed to me, that in the cruel and stubborn struggle with the Devil, the principle of material forces, it is fated that I shall be victorious; and thereafter, spirit and matter are to merge together in exquisite harmony and the reign of Universal Will is to begin. But that cannot be till, little by little, after a long, long series of centuries, the moon, the shining dog-star and the earth are turned to dust. . . . Till then there shall be horror and desolation. . . . (*A pause; against the background of the lake appear two red spots.*) Behold, my mighty antagonist, the Devil, approaches. I see his awful, blood-red eyes . . .

ARCADINA.—There's a smell of sulphur. Is that part of it?

TREPLEF.—Yes.

ARCADINA (*laughing*).—I see, a scenic effect.

TREPLEF.—Mother!

NINA.—He is lonely without man.

PAULINE (*to* DORN).—Why, you've taken your hat off. Put it on again, or you'll catch cold.

ARCADINA.—The doctor's taking off his hat to the Devil, the father of Eternal Matter.

TREPLEF (*angry, in a loud voice*).—The play is over! That's enough! Curtain!

ARCADINA.—What are you angry about?

TREPLEF.—That's enough. Curtain! Lower the curtain! (*Stamping.*) Curtain! (*The curtain is lowered.*) I must apologise. I ought to have remembered that only a few chosen spirits can write plays or act them. I have been infringing the monopoly. You . . . I . . . (*Is about to add something, but makes a gesture of renouncing the idea, and Exit,* L.)

ARCADINA.—What's the matter with him?

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SORIN.—Irene, my dear, you oughtn't to treat a young man's *amour propre* like that.

ARCADINA.—Why, what have I said ?

SORIN.—You have hurt his feelings.

ARCADINA.—He warned us beforehand that it was all a joke ; I've only taken him at his word and treated it as a joke.

SORIN.—But still . . .

ARCADINA.—And now it appears that he has written a masterpiece. Mercy on us ! So he has got up this performance and stifled us with brimstone not as a joke, but as a demonstration. . . . He wanted to teach us how to write and what we ought to act. Really, this sort of thing gets tedious ! These perpetual digs and pinpricks would wear out the patience of a saint. He's a peevish, conceited boy.

SORIN.—He only wanted to give you pleasure.

ARCADINA.—Did he ? Then why couldn't he choose some ordinary sort of play, instead of making us listen to this decadent nonsense ? I don't mind listening to nonsense now and again for fun ; but this pretends to show us new forms, a new era in art. I see no new forms in it ; I see nothing but an evil disposition.

TRIGORIN.—Everyone writes as he wants to, and as he can.

ARCADINA.—Let him write as he wants and can, and welcome ; only let him leave me in peace.

DORN (*singing*).—" Great Jove, art angry yet " . . .

ARCADINA.—I'm not Jove, I'm a woman. (*Lighting a cigarette.*) Besides, I'm not angry ; I only think it's a pity that a young man should spend his time so tediously. I had no intention of hurting his feelings.

MEDVEDENKO.—No one has any grounds for differentiating spirit and matter ; spirit itself is very likely a collection of material atoms. (*Eagerly to* TRIGORIN.) Ah, if only someone would write a play and put it on the stage, showing the life we schoolmasters lead ! It's a hard, hard life ![1]

[1] If Tchekhof makes Medvedenko a little ridiculous, he is sorry for him too. He was always concerned about the miserable conditions in which village

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ARCADINA. Quite true; but don't let us talk about plays or atoms. What a glorious evening! Do you hear? The peasants are singing. (*Listening.*) How beautiful!

PAULINE.—That's on the farther shore. (*A pause.*)

ARCADINA (*to* TRIGORIN).—Sit by me here. Ten or fifteen years ago there was music and singing to be heard here by the lake almost every evening. There were six big country houses round the shore. It was all laughter, and noise, and the firing of guns . . . and love-making, love-making without end. The *Jeune Premier*, the idol of all six houses, was our friend here. (*Nodding at* DORN.) You haven't met? Dr Dorn, Eugene Sergéitch. He is still charming, but in those days he was irresistible. But my conscience is beginning to prick me. Why did I hurt my poor boy's feelings? I feel uneasy. (*Calling.*) Constantine! Dear boy! Constantine!

MASHA.—I'll go and look for him.

ARCADINA.—Do, there's a dear.

MASHA (*going* L).—A-oo! Constantine Gavrilovitch! A-oo! [*Exit*

NINA (*coming from behind the stage*).—Evidently we're not to go on. I can come out. How do you do? (*Kisses* ARCADINA *and* PAULINE.)

SORIN.—Bravo, bravo.

ARCADINA.—Bravo, bravo. We were all enchanted. With

schoolmasters worked. "Good teachers," he said to Gorky, "are the first necessity for village life. Without a general education of the people the Empire will fall to pieces like a house built of badly baked bricks. The schoolmaster ought to be an artist in love with his work, instead of which he is a labourer who goes to it as he would go to exile in Siberia. Hungry, oppressed and terrified, he ought to be the first man in the village." He dreamt, vaguely, of building a sanatorium for sick ushers at Kutchuk-Koi in the Crimea: "a big bright building, with big windows and high ceilings; a library; various musical instruments; a bee walk, an orchard, a kitchen garden; with lectures on agriculture, meteorology, etcetera" (Pamyati, 83, 84). Fortunately this dreadful place was never built; but the schoolmasters of the Empire are so grateful for his representation of them in his plays and stories that they are establishing a Teachers' Club in his honour, in connection with their Friendly Society in Moscow ("Jubilee Sbornik," 6).

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such a face and figure, with such a lovely voice, it is wicked to stay hidden in the country. I am sure that you have talent. Mark my words! You must go on the stage.

NINA.—Oh, it is the dream of my life! (*Sighing.*) But it can never be realised.

ARCADINA.—Who knows? Let me introduce you: Trigórin, Boris Alexéyevitch.

NINA.—Oh, I'm so glad. (*Shyly.*) I read all you write. . . .

ARCADINA (*making* NINA *sit by her*).—Don't be shy, my dear. He has a simple soul, although he's a celebrity. You see, he's just as shy himself.

DORN.—I suppose we can have the curtain up again now? It feels rather uncanny like this.

SHAMRAYEF (*loud*).—Yákof, pull the curtain up, my lad, will you?

Curtain is raised.

NINA (*to* TRIGORIN).—It's a strange play, isn't it?

TRIGORIN.—I didn't understand a word. However, I enjoyed looking on. You acted with such sincerity. And the scenery was lovely. (*A pause.*) No doubt there are a great many fish in this lake?

NINA.—Yes.

TRIGORIN.—I love fishing. I know no greater pleasure than to sit towards evening by the water and watch a float.

NINA.—Surely, for one who has tasted the pleasure of creation, all other pleasures cease to exist.

ARCADINA (*laughing*).—You mustn't talk to him like that. If people make him pretty speeches he runs away.

SHAMRAYEF.—I remember one day in the opera-house at Moscow, the famous Silva took the low C. As luck would have it, there was one of our Synod choirmen [1] sitting in the gallery; imagine our astonishment when all of a sudden we heard a voice from the gallery, "Bravo, Silva," a whole octave lower.

[1] *Synod choirman.* A member of the choir founded in 1892 under the direction of the Holy Synod to serve two of the principal churches in the Kremlin, to sing in religious street processions in Moscow, etc.

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Like this. (*In a deep bass voice:*) "Bravo, Silva." The audience was dumfounded. (*A pause.*)

DORN.—There's an angel flying over the park.

NINA.—I must be off. Good-bye.

ARCADINA.—Where are you going? Why so early? We won't let you go.

NINA.—Papa's expecting me.

ARCADINA.—It's too bad of him. (*They kiss.*) Well, we can't help it. It's very, very sad to part with you.

NINA.—If only you knew how unwilling I am to go.

ARCADINA.—Somebody must see you home, darling.

NINA (*alarmed*).—Oh no, no!

SORIN (*imploringly*).—Don't go!

NINA.—I must, Peter Nikolayevitch.

SORIN.—Stay just for an hour, confound it all. It's too bad.

NINA (*hesitating; then crying*).—I can't. (*Shakes hands and exit quickly.*)

ARCADINA.—There's a really unfortunate girl! They say that her mother left her husband all her huge fortune when she died, down to the last farthing, and now this child is left with nothing, for he's made a will bequeathing it all to his second wife. It's monstrous.

DORN.—Yes, her papa's a pretty mean sort of a sneak, to do him justice.

SORIN (*rubbing his hands to warm them*).—We'd better be going too; it's getting damp. My legs are beginning to ache.

ARCADINA.—They're like bits of wood, you can hardly walk on them. Come along, ill-fated patriarch! (*Takes his arm.*)

SHAMRAYEF (*offering his arm to his wife*).—Madame?

SORIN.—There's that dog howling again. (*To* SHAMRAYEF.) Please tell them to unchain that dog, Ilyá Afanásyevitch.

SHAMRAYEF.—Can't be done, Peter Nikolayevitch; I'm afraid of thieves breaking into the barn. I've got the millet there. (*To* MEDVEDENKO, *who walks beside him.*) Yes, a whole octave lower: "Bravo, Silva!" And not a concert singer, mind you, but an ordinary Synod choirman.

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MEDVEDENKO.—And what salary does a Synod choirman get ?

[*Exeunt Omnes, except* DORN

DORN (*alone*).—I don't know. Perhaps I don't understand anything, or I'm going off my head, but the fact is I liked the play. There was something in it. When the girl spoke of her solitude, and then afterwards when the Devil's red eyes appeared, my hands trembled with excitement. It was fresh and naïf. There he comes apparently. I want to say all the nice things I can to him.

Enter TREPLEF

TREPLEF.—They've all gone.

DORN.—I'm here.

TREPLEF.—Masha's looking for me all over the park. Repulsive female !

DORN.—Constantine Gavrilovitch, I liked your play extremely. It was a curious kind of thing and I didn't hear the end, but all the same it made a deep impression on me. You are a man of talent, and you must go on.

TREPLEF *squeezes his hand and embraces him eagerly.*

DORN.—What a nervous creature you are ! Tears in his eyes ! What did I want to say ? You have chosen a subject in the realm of abstract ideas. You were quite right ; every artistic production ought to express a great thought. Nothing is beautiful unless it is serious. How pale you are !

TREPLEF.—So you think that I ought to go on ? [1]

DORN.—Yes. But represent only what is important and eternal. You know that I have lived my life with variety and discrimination ; I'm quite contented ; but if ever I felt the elevation of spirit which comes to artists in the moment of creation, I am sure that I should despise my material envelope and all that belongs to it and be carried away from the earth aloft into the heights.

[1] Tchekhof, in writing these lines, cannot but have recalled his own feelings of gratitude when, still an unknown young writer, he received a letter of encouragement from the great Grigorovitch. His letter in answer is the most engagingly warm-hearted thing imaginable (" Letters," 32).

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TREPLEF.—Excuse me, where is Nina Zarétchnaya ?

DORN.—And then there's another thing. In every production there must be a clear and well-defined idea. You must know what your object is in writing ; otherwise, if you travel this picturesque path without a well-defined aim, you will go astray and your talent will be your ruin.

TREPLEF (*impatiently*).—Where is Nina Zarétchnaya ?

DORN.—She's gone home.

TREPLEF (*in despair*).—What am I to do ? I want to see her. I *must* see her. I shall drive after her.

Enter MASHA

DORN (*to* TREPLEF).—Calm yourself, my friend.

TREPLEF.—All the same I shall go after her. I must go after her.

MASHA.—Please go up to the house, Constantine Gavrilovitch. Your mother's waiting for you. She's anxious about you.

TREPLEF.—Tell her I've gone out. And please, all of you, leave me in peace ! Leave me alone ! Don't follow me about !

DORN.—Come, come, my dear boy. You mustn't talk like that. . . . It isn't right.

TREPLEF (*with tears in his eyes*).—Good-bye, doctor. Thank you. [*Exit*

DORN (*sighing*).—Ah, youth ! youth !

MASHA.—When there is nothing else left to say, people say : " Ah, youth ! youth ! " (*Takes snuff.*)

DORN (*taking* MASHA'S *snuff-box and throwing it into the bushes*).—A filthy habit ! (*Pause*). They seem to be having music up at the house. We must go in.

MASHA.—Stop a moment.

DORN.—Eh ?

MASHA.—I want to say something to you again. I want to talk. (*Agitated.*) I don't care for my father, but my heart goes out to you. I somehow feel, with all my soul, that you are near to me. . . . Come, help me. Help me, or I shall

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commit some folly, I shall make havoc of my life. . . . I can't hold out any longer.

DORN.—What is it ? How am I to help you ?

MASHA.—I am in pain. No one knows my sufferings. (*Laying her head on his breast, softly.*) I am in love with Constantine.

DORN.—What bundles of nerves they all are ! And what a lot of love. . . . Oh, magic lake ! Oh, magic lake ! (*Tenderly.*) What can I do, my child ? What can I do ?

[*Curtain*

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ACT II

The croquet lawn. Far up at the back, on the right, the house with big verandah. On the left the lake is visible, with the reflection of the sun twinkling in the waters. Flower-beds. Midday; hot. At the side of the croquet lawn, in the shade of an old lime-tree, sit ARCADINA, DORN *and* MASHA *on a bench.* DORN *has a book open on his knees.*

ARCADINA (*to* MASHA).—Come, get up. (*They get up.*) Let us stand side by side. You are twenty-two and I am nearly twice as much. Eugene Sergéitch, which of us looks the youngest?

DORN.—You do of course.

ARCADINA.—There! And why? Because I work, because I feel, because I am always on the move. While you remain sitting in one place; you don't live. And I make it a rule, never to look forward into the future. I never think about old age or death. What will be will be.

MASHA.—And I, I have a feeling as if I had been born ages and ages ago. I drag my life, a dead weight, after me, like the train of an endless dress. Often I have no desire to live. (*Sits.*) Of course, this is all rubbish. One must shake oneself and throw it all off.

DORN (*singing softly*).—"Tell her, tell her, pretty flowers."

ARCADINA.—Then again, I am always "correct," like an Englishman. I keep myself up to the mark, as they say, and am always dressed, and have my hair done *comme il faut.* I should never dream of leaving the house, even to come into the garden like this, in a *négligé*, or with my hair undone. Never. The reason I am so well preserved is that I have never been a dowdy, never let myself go as some do. . . . (*Walks*

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up and down the croquet lawn with arms akimbo.) There! you see? as light as a bird; ready to act the part of a girl of fifteen any day.

DORN.—Well, I'm going on anyway. (*Taking up his book.*) We'd got as far as the cornchandler and the rats.

ARCADINA.—And the rats. Go on. (*Sits.*) No, give it to me. I'll read. It's my turn. (*Taking the book and looking for the place.*) And the rats. Here we are. (*Reading.*) "Truly, it is just as dangerous for people of fashion to beguile novelists to their houses as it would be for a cornchandler to rear rats in his granary. And yet they are much sought after. When a woman has chosen the writer that she wishes to take captive, she lays siege to him by means of flattery and delicate attentions. . . ." That may be true in France, but we have nothing of the sort in Russia; we have no programme. As a rule, before a Russian woman takes her writer captive she's head over ears in love with him. No need to look far afield; take me and Trigórin, for instance.

Enter SORIN, *leaning on a stick;* NINA *beside him.* MEDVEDENKO *wheels a chair behind them*

SORIN (*as if talking to a child*).—Eh? so we're having a treat? We're happy for once, confound it all! (*To* ARCADINA.) Such fun! Papa and stepmamma have gone to Tver, and we're free for three whole days.

NINA (*sitting by* ARCADINA *and embracing her*).—I am so happy! Now I belong to you.

SORIN (*sitting in his chair*).—She's in looks to-day.

ARCADINA.—Well dressed and interesting. That's a good girl! (*Kisses her.*) We mustn't praise you too much for fear of bewitching you.[1] Where is Trigórin?

NINA.—Down at the bathing-place, fishing.

ARCADINA.—I wonder he doesn't get sick of it! (*Prepares to go on reading.*)

NINA.—What is the book?

[1] *Bewitching you—i.e.* exercising the power of the Evil Eye on you, by exciting our own envy.

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ARCADINA.—Maupassant's "On the Water," my dear. (*Reads a few lines to herself.*) The rest's dull and quite untrue. (*Shutting the book.*) I am feeling anxious and perturbed. Tell me, what is the matter with my son? Why is he so gloomy and morose? He passes whole days together on the lake and I hardly ever see him.

MASHA.—He is troubled at heart. (*To Nina; timidly.*) I wish you would recite something from his play.

NINA (*shrugging her shoulders*).—Really? It's so dull.

MASHA (*with restrained enthusiasm*).—When *he* reads anything aloud, his eyes glow and his face turns pale. He has a beautiful melancholy voice, and manners like a poet.

SORIN *snores audibly.*

DORN.—Good-night.

ARCADINA,—Peter!

SORIN.—Eh?

ARCADINA.—Are you asleep?

SORIN.—Not I. (*A pause.*)

ARCADINA.—It's so foolish of you not to undergo a treatment, Peter.

SORIN.—I should be delighted, but Dorn won't let me.

DORN.—A treatment at sixty!

SORIN.—Even at sixty one wants to live.

DORN (*testily*).—Eh! Very well then, take Valerian drops.

ARCADINA.—I think he ought to go and take the waters somewhere.

DORN.—All right. He can go if he likes . . . or he can stop at home if he likes.

ARCADINA.—How's one to understand you?

DORN.—There's nothing to understand. It's perfectly plain. (*A pause.*)

MEDVEDENKO.—Peter Nikolayevitch ought to give up smoking.

SORIN.—Rubbish!

DORN.—No, it's not rubbish. Wine and tobacco rob us of our individuality. After a cigar or a glass of vodka you are

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no longer Peter Nikolayevitch but Peter Nikolayevitch plus somebody else. Your ego evaporates, and you think of yourself in the third person; not as "me" but as "him."

SORIN (*laughing*).—It's all very well for you to talk. You've lived in your time; but what about me? I have spent twenty-eight years in the law courts, but I haven't begun to live yet, haven't had any experiences, confound it all, and isn't it natural that I long to live at last? You are sated and indifferent and therefore you are disposed to philosophise; but I want to live, and that's why I drink sherry at dinner and smoke cigars and all the rest of it. That's all.

DORN.—One ought to be serious about life. But to take medicine at sixty and lament that one did not have fun enough when one was young, that, if you'll excuse me, is frivolous.

MASHA (*rising*).—It must be lunch-time. (*Walking lazily.*) My leg's gone to sleep. [*Exit*

DORN.—She's going to get down a couple of glasses of vodka before lunch.

SORIN.—The poor thing gets no enjoyment out of life.

DORN.—Rot, your Excellency.

SORIN.—You talk like a man who has had his fill.

ARCADINA.—Oh dear! oh dear! what can be more tedious than this truly rural country tedium! So hot! so quiet! No one does anything; everyone philosophises.[1] You're pleasant company, my friends, and it's very nice to hear you talk, but . . . Oh, to be sitting in one's hotel, studying one's part, how very much nicer!

NINA (*enthusiastically*).—Oh, indeed! How well I can understand you!

SORIN.—Of course it's better in town. Sitting in one's

[1] In a letter of 1889 ("Letters," 138) Tchekhof speaks of a comedy that he began and put aside. "I wrote two acts and threw it up; it turned out tedious; there is nothing so tedious as a tedious play." The rest of the letter, written in summer, in the depths of the country, where his brother was ill, when "neighbours come, day follows days, conversation follows conversation," recalls this scene enough to suggest that *The Seagull* may have been the tedious comedy in question; either that or *Ivánof*.

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study, all visitors have to send their names up by the footman, a telephone handy . . . cabs in the street and all the rest of it. . . .

DORN (*singing*).—"Tell her, tell her, pretty flowers!"

Enter SHAMRAYEF; *after him* PAULINE

SHAMRAYEF.—There they are. Good day to you. (*Kisses* ARCADINA'S *hand, then* NINA'S.) (*To* ARCADINA.) Very glad to see you in such good health. My wife tells me you were thinking of driving into town with her to-day. Is that true?

ARCADINA.—Yes, we're going into town.

SHAMRAYEF.—Hm! That's all very well, but how do you propose to get there, my dear madam? We're carrying the rye to-day, and all the labourers are busy. What horses are you to have, I should like to know?

ARCADINA.—What horses? How should I know what horses?

SORIN.—There are the carriage horses.

SHAMRAYEF (*excited*).—The carriage horses? And where am I to get collars from? Where am I to get collars? It really is extraordinary! Incomprehensible! My dear madam, you must excuse me. I have the greatest respect for your talents. I am ready to give ten years of my life for you, but horses I cannot let you have.

ARCADINA.—But if I have to go into town? This is really too much.

SHAMRAYEF.—My dear lady! You do not know what farming means.

ARCADINA (*angry*).—It is the old story again! If that is the case I go back to Moscow to-day. Send to the village to hire horses for me, or I shall go to the station on foot.

SHAMRAYEF (*angry*).—In that case I resign my post! You must look for a new agent! [*Exit*

ARCADINA.—It is the same thing every summer; every summer I am insulted here. I will never set foot in this place again.

[*Exit* L., *towards the bathing-place*

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A minute later she is seen going up to the house. TRIGORIN *follows her with fishing rods and pail.*

SORIN (*angry*).—This is effrontery! This is beyond all bounds! I'll stand it no more, confound it all! Let *all* the horses be brought here at once!

NINA (*to* PAULINE).—Refuse Madame Arcádina, the famous actress! Is not every lightest wish of hers, or even caprice, of more importance than your farming arrangements? It is absolutely incredible.

PAULINE (*in despair*).—What can I do? Imagine yourself in my position. What can I do?

SORIN (*to* NINA).—Let us follow my sister. We will all entreat her not to go away, eh? (*Looking in the direction where* SHAMRAYEF *went out.*) Hateful fellow! Tyrant!

NINA (*preventing him from rising*).—Sit down, sit down. We will wheel you. (*She and* MEDVEDENKO *wheel the chair.*) What an awful thing to have happened!

SORIN.—Perfectly awful. But he shall not get out of it like that. I shall give him a piece of my mind.

[*Exeunt.* DORN *and* PAULINE *remain*

DORN.—How monotonous people are! Of course the right thing would have been to fire your husband right out and have done with him, but the end of it will be that this old woman Peter Sorin and his sister will apologise and ask him to forgive them. You'll see.

PAULINE.—He has sent the carriage horses to help carry the rye. These misunderstandings happen day after day. If you knew how agitating it all is for me. I shall be ill; see, I am all trembling. . . . His bad manners are more than I can bear. (*Entreating.*) Eugene, my dearest, my darling, let me leave him and come to you. Time is flying over us, we are no longer young; let us have done with concealment and falsehood before our days are ended. (*A pause.*)

DORN.—I am fifty-five. It is too late to change my way of life.

PAULINE.—I know why you refuse. It is because there are

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other women besides myself who are dear to you. You cannot let them all come to you. I understand. Forgive me; you are tired of me.

NINA *appears near the house, picking flowers.*

DORN.—No, no, I'm not tired of you.

PAULINE.—I suffer agonies of jealousy. Of course you are a doctor; you cannot avoid women. I understand.

DORN (*to* NINA, *who comes down*).—How are they getting on?

NINA.—Madame Arcádina is crying and Monsieur Sorin has got asthma.

DORN (*rising*).—I must go and give them both some Valerian drops.

NINA (*giving him her flowers*).—These are for you.

DORN.—Merci bien. (*Goes towards the house.*)

PAULINE (*following him*).—What pretty flowers! (*Near the house, in a low voice:*) Give me those flowers! Give me those flowers! (*She tears them up and throws them aside.*)

[*Exeunt into the house*

NINA (*alone*).—How strange to see an eminent actress in tears, and all about such a trifle! And is it not wonderful that a famous writer, the darling of the public, mentioned daily in the papers, with his photograph in the shop windows, his books translated into foreign languages, should spend his whole day fishing and be delighted because he has caught two chub.[1] I imagined that famous people were proud and inaccessible, that they despised the crowd, and by their fame, by the glamour of their names, as it were, revenged themselves on the world for giving birth and riches the first place. But it seems they cry, fish, play cards, laugh and get angry like everyone else. . . .

Enter TREPLEF, *hatless, with a gun and a dead seagull*

TREPLEF (*at the gate*).—Are you alone?

NINA.—Yes. (TREPLEF *lays the bird at her feet.*)

NINA.—What does that mean?

[1] Fishing with a float and looking for mushrooms were Tchekhof's own favourite occupations when he was in the country.

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TREPLEF.—I have been brute enough to shoot this seagull. I lay it at your feet.

NINA.—What is the matter with you? (*She takes up the gull and looks at it.*)

TREPLEF (*after a pause*).—I shall soon kill myself in the same way.

NINA.—You are not yourself.

TREPLEF.—No, not since you ceased to be yourself. You have changed towards me; you look coldly at me; you are not at ease when I am by.

NINA.—You have grown nervous and irritable of late; you express yourself incomprehensibly in what seem to be symbols. This seagull seems to be another symbol; but, I am afraid I don't understand. (*Laying it on the seat.*) I am too simple to understand you.

TREPLEF.—It began the night of the idiotic fiasco of my play. Women cannot forgive failure. I have burnt everything, everything to the last scrap. If only you knew how unhappy I am! Your sudden indifference to me is terrible, incredible, as if I woke one morning and behold, this lake had dried up or run away into the earth. You said just now that you are too simple to understand me. Oh, what is there to understand? My play was a failure; you despise my inspiration; you look on me as commonplace and worthless, like hundreds of others. . . . (*Stamping.*) How well I can understand it! How well I can understand it! I feel as if there were a nail being driven into my brain. The devil take it. The devil take my vanity too, which sucks out my blood, sucks it out like a snake. (*Seeing* TRIGORIN, *who reads a notebook as he walks.*) There goes the man of real talent; he walks like Hamlet; with a book too. (*Mocking.*) "Words, words, words!" This sun has not yet risen on you, yet you smile already, your looks are melted in his rays. I will not stand in your way.

[*Exit quickly*

TRIGORIN (*writing in his book*).—Takes snuff and drinks

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vodka. . . . Always dressed in black. Schoolmaster in love with her.

NINA.—Good-morning, Boris Alexéyevitch.

TRIGORIN.—Good-morning.[1] It appears that owing to some unexpected turn of events we are leaving to-day. You and I are hardly likely to meet again. I am sorry. I do not often come across young women, young interesting women; I have already forgotten how one feels at eighteen or nineteen and I cannot imagine it very clearly; so that the young women in my stories and novels are generally untrue to life. How I should like to be in your place, if only for an hour, so as to know what you think and what manner of creature you are altogether.

NINA.—And how I should like to be in your place!

TRIGORIN.—Why?

NINA.—So as to know how it feels to be a gifted and famous writer. What does fame feel like? What sensation does it produce in you?

TRIGORIN.—What sensation? Evidently, none. I never thought about it. (*Reflecting.*) One of two things; either you exaggerate my fame, or fame produces no sensation.

NINA.—But if you read about yourself in the papers?

TRIGORIN.—When they praise me I like it; when they abuse me I feel low-spirited for a day or two.

NINA.—What a world to live in! How I envy you, if you but knew it! How different are the lots of different people! Some can hardly drag on their tedious, insignificant existence, they are all alike, all miserable; others, like you for instance—you are one in a million—are blessed with a brilliant, interesting life, all full of meaning. . . . You are happy.

TRIGORIN.—Am I? (*Shrugging his shoulders.*) Hm! . . . You talk of fame and happiness, of some brilliant interesting life; but for me all these pretty words, if I may say so, are just

[1] The actor who plays Trigorin would do well to imitate Tchekhof himself as his friends describe him: A sad, thoughtful face, a soft, intimate way of talking, a childlike shyness; shrinking from praise, gentle in all his movements; then, when the moment comes, a sort of exaltation.

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like marmalade, which I never eat. You are very young and very kind.

NINA.—What a delightful life is yours!

TRIGORIN.—What is there so very fine about it? (*Looking at his watch.*) I must be off to my writing in a moment. You must excuse me; I can't stop. (*Laughs.*) You have trodden on my favourite corn,[1] as they say, and you see, I begin to get excited and angry at once. However, let us talk. We'll talk about my delightful, brilliant life. . . . Come on; where shall we begin? (*Meditating.*) You have heard of obsessions, when a man is haunted day and night, say, by the idea of the moon or something? Well, I've got my moon. Day and night I am obsessed by the same persistent thought; I must write, I must write, I must write. . . . No sooner have I finished one story than I am somehow compelled to write another, then a third, after the third a fourth. I write without stopping, except to change horses like a postchaise. I have no choice. What is there brilliant or delightful in that, I should like to know? It's a dog's life! Here I am talking to you, excited and delighted, yet never for one moment do I forget that there is an unfinished story waiting for me indoors. I see a cloud shaped like a grand piano. I think: I must mention somewhere in a story that a cloud went by, shaped like a grand piano. I smell heliotrope. I say to myself: Sickly smell, mourning shade, must be mentioned in describing a summer evening. I lie in wait for each phrase, for each word that falls from my lips or yours and hasten to lock all these words and phrases away in my literary storeroom: they may come in handy some day. When I finish a piece of work, I fly to the theatre or go fishing, in the hope of resting, of forgetting myself, but no, a new subject is already turning, like a heavy iron ball, in my brain, some invisible force drags me to my table and I must make haste to write and write. And so on for ever and ever. I have no rest from myself; I feel that I am devouring

[1] *Favourite corn.* A piece of English humour strayed over to Russia, probably in the pages of Jerome K. Jerome, who is much *goûté* over there.

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my own life, that for the honey which I give to unknown mouths out in the void, I rob my choicest flowers of their pollen, pluck the flowers themselves and trample on their roots. Surely I must be mad? Surely my friends and acquaintances do not treat me as they would treat a sane man? "What are you writing at[1] now? What are we going to have next?" So the same thing goes on over and over again, until I feel as if my friends' interest, their praise and admiration, were all a deception; they are deceiving me as one deceives a sick man, and sometimes I'm afraid that at any moment they may steal on me from behind and seize me and carry me off, like Póprishtchin[2] to a madhouse. In the old days, my young best days, when I was a beginner, my work was a continual torture. An unimportant writer, especially when things are going against him, feels clumsy, awkward and superfluous; his nerves are strained and tormented; he cannot keep from hovering about people who have to do with art and literature, unrecognised, unnoticed, afraid to look men frankly in the eye, like a passionate gambler who has no money to play with. The reader that I never saw presented himself to my imagination as something unfriendly and mistrustful. I was afraid of the public; it terrified me; and when each new play of mine was put on, I felt every time that the dark ones in the audience were hostile and the fair ones coldly indifferent. How frightful it was! What agony I went through!

NINA.—But surely inspiration and the process of creation give you sublime and happy moments?

TRIGORIN.—Yes. It's a pleasant feeling writing; . . . and looking over proofs is pleasant too. But as soon as the thing is published my heart sinks, and I see that it is a failure, a mistake, that I ought not to have written it at all; then I am

[1] *Writing at*; *popísyvat* instead of *pisát*; one of their charming compound verbs, half frequentative and half diminutive. It suggests that his writing is a sort of game, something that serves to keep him out of mischief. The critic Mikhailovsky used it, in early days, of Tchekhof's compositions ("Karpof," 43).

[2] *Póprishtchin*. The hero of Gogol's "Diary of a Madman."

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angry with myself, and feel horrible. . . . (*Laughing*). And the public reads it and says: "How charming! How clever! . . . How charming, but not a patch on Tolstoy!" or "It's a delightful story, but not so good as Turgénef's 'Fathers and Sons.'" And so on, to my dying day, my writings will always be clever and charming, clever and charming, nothing more. And when I die, my friends, passing by my grave, will say: "Here lies Trigórin. He was a charming writer, but not so good as Turgénef!"

NINA.—You must excuse me; I *refuse* to understand you. You are simply spoilt by success.

TRIGORIN.—By what success? I've never satisfied *myself*. I do not care for myself as a writer. The worst of it is that I live in a kind of bewilderment and often do not understand what I write. I love water like this, trees, sky; I have the feeling for nature; it wakes a passion in me, an irresistible desire to write. But I am something more than a landscape-painter; I am a citizen as well; I love my country, I love the people; I feel that if I am a writer I am bound to speak of the people, of its sufferings, of its future, to speak of science, of the rights of man, etcetera, etcetera; and I speak about it all, volubly, and am attacked angrily in return by everyone; I dart from side to side like a fox run down by the hounds; I see that life and science fly farther and farther ahead of me, and I fall farther and farther behind, like the countryman running after the train [1]; and in the end I feel that the only thing I can write of is the landscape, and in everything else I am untrue to life, false to the very marrow of my bones.

NINA.—You work too hard; you have no time or wish to realise your own importance. You may be dissatisfied with yourself, but in the eyes of others you are great and wonderful. If I were a writer like you I would sacrifice my whole life to the million, but I would realise that its only happiness was to raise itself up to me; they should pull my chariot along.

[1] In some story, one presumes.

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TRIGORIN.—Chariot indeed! . . . Am I an Agamemnon then, eh? (*They both smile.*)

NINA.—For such happiness as to be a writer or an actress I would endure the hatred of my nearest and dearest. I would endure poverty and disillusionment. I would lodge in a garret and live on black bread. I would suffer dissatisfaction with myself, the consciousness of my own imperfections, but in return I would demand glory . . . real, ringing glory. (*Covering her face with her hands.*) My head swims. Ouf!

ARCADINA (*heard from the house*).—Boris Alexéyevitch!

TRIGORIN.—I'm being called. To pack, no doubt. But I don't want to go away. (*Looking at the lake.*) Isn't it heavenly? Just look at it!

NINA.—You see that house and garden on the farther shore?

TRIGORIN.—Yes.

NINA.—They used to belong to my mother. I was born there. I have spent the whole of my life by this lake and I know every little island on it.

TRIGORIN.—It's perfectly delicious here! (*Seeing the seagull.*) And what's this?

NINA.—A seagull. Constantine Gavrilovitch shot it.

TRIGORIN.—It's a lovely bird. I don't want to go away at all. Persuade Madame Arcádina to stay. (*Writes in his notebook.*)

NINA.—What are you writing?

TRIGORIN.—I was just making a note.[1] A subject occurred to me. (*Putting notebook away.*) A subject for a short story. A girl—like yourself, say—lives from her childhood on the shores of a lake. She loves the lake like a seagull, and is happy and free like a seagull. But a man comes along by chance and

[1] Tchekhof himself had whole pocket-books full of subjects for stories ("Pamyati," 170); but he discouraged the random use of notes as positively harmful to an imaginative writer. "There is no need to write down comparisons, neat characterisations, or details of natural scenes: all this must present itself of its own accord, when it is wanted. But a naked fact, a rare game, a technical appellation, should be entered in a book; otherwise it will get scattered and lost." For the rest, he said, "what is important will stick; and the details you can always discover or invent" (*ibid.* 131).

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